

NEWS RELEASE

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Defendant Sentenced to Maximum Term for 1997 Firebombing of Champaign County Courthouse

Urbana, IL— The man convicted of the April 8, 1997 firebombing of the Champaign County courthouse was sentenced today to the maximum term, life imprisonment plus 40 years, as announced by Jan Paul Miller, United States Attorney for the Central District of Illinois. Chief U.S. District Judge Michael P. McCuskey sentenced John Edward Ewing, Jr., age 45, to the provisional sentence after determining that Ewing is currently mentally unfit to participate in court proceedings.

Federal law provides that a defendant convicted of an offense but suffering from a mental disease that requires care and treatment, must be committed to the custody of the Attorney General for hospitalization, care and treatment in a suitable facility. The commitment is for a provisional sentence of imprisonment to the maximum term authorized by law for each of the offenses for which the defendant was found guilty. In this case, Ewing was sentenced to life imprisonment for using a destructive device during a crime of violence to be followed by a consecutive term of 40 years imprisonment for arson. In the future, should medical officials with the federal Bureau of Prisons determine that Ewing has recovered from his mental disease to the extent that he is no longer in need of custody for care and treatment, the court may proceed to final sentencing and may modify the provisional sentence. Until then, Ewing will remain in custody at an appropriate federal Bureau of Prisons facility for care and treatment.

(More)

A federal jury convicted Ewing in September 2004 following a week-long trial in Rock Island, Illinois, for maliciously damaging the Champaign County Courthouse by means of fire and explosive materials and for using and carrying a destructive device during a crime of violence. Evidence presented by the government at trial showed that Ewing entered a courtroom in the Champaign County courthouse on April 8, 1997 and threw an incendiary bomb, commonly known as a "Molotov cocktail," at a judge who was presiding over a jury trial, resulting in the personal injury of several persons, including the judge, and causing more than \$200,000 damage to the courthouse. The jury rejected an insanity defense raised by Ewing.

According to court records, Ewing was arrested on federal charges on April 8, 1997 in connection with the firebombing. On April 11, 1997, following a preliminary examination, U.S. Magistrate Judge David G. Bernthal ordered Ewing be detained pending trial. The court also allowed a motion by Ewing's attorney for a psychiatric examination of his client to determine his competency to stand trial.

On July 16, 1997, U.S. District Judge Michael M. Mihm held that Ewing was mentally unfit to stand trial at that time and ordered his further commitment at a Bureau of Prisons facility in Springfield, Missouri. One year later, on July 15, 1998, a U.S. District Judge in the Western District of Missouri ordered Ewing's continued commitment finding that he suffered from a mental disease or defect and his release from confinement would create a substantial risk of bodily injury to another person or serious damage to the property of another.

During a hearing on May 9, 2002, U.S. District Judge Michael McCuskey found that Ewing had been restored to competency to stand trial. Judge McCuskey again ruled that Ewing was competent to stand trial during a pre-trial hearing on September 8, 2004.

The case was investigated by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; the Urbana Police Department; and the Champaign County Sheriff's Office. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Eugene L. Miller.